

# Wheels of Misfortune



Photo by Richard Sternberg

Youngsters like this one are asking for trouble when they don't wear the recommended scooter-safety gear: a helmet and knee and elbow pads.

That's what some people are calling those new, unpowered, lightweight-aluminum scooters with the small, low-friction wheels similar to the ones you find on in-line skates.

From January through October 2000, an estimated 27,600 people sought emergency-room care for scooter-related injuries. In September 2000, the estimated number of injuries seen in emergency rooms was nearly 18 times higher than it was in May 2000.

Two people have died while using these scooters. One of the casualties was an adult who fell and hit his head while showing his daughter how to ride a scooter. The other victim was a 6-year-old boy who rode into traffic and was hit by a car.

On the basis of in-line-skating and bicycling data, many of these injuries might have been prevented or reduced in severity if the victims had worn protective equipment. Helmets can prevent 85 percent of head injuries, elbow pads can prevent 82 percent of elbow injuries, and kneepads can prevent 32 percent of knee injuries. Although wrist guards are effective in preventing injuries to in-line skaters, the protection they provide against injuries to scooter riders isn't known because they make it difficult to grip the scooter handle and steer.

Here are some recommendations to help prevent scooter-related injuries to your children:

- Follow the manufacturer's guidance.
- Ensure the model you have isn't under recall by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).
- Wear a helmet that meets the standard established by the CPSC.
- Use knee and elbow pads.
- Ride scooters on smooth, paved surfaces without traffic, and avoid streets and surfaces with water, sand, gravel, or dirt.
- Try to keep your body evenly balanced at all times, and don't lean too far forward. Always keep your body at an angle, instead of facing forward.
- Do not ride scooters at night.
- Don't forget to use the back foot brake, if your model has one, to stop in an emergency.
- Parents: Supervise your young children when they ride their scooters.

Like all sports, riding a scooter can become dangerous if you don't take the necessary precautions. Once you catch on to the basics, though, it probably will become one of your favorite outdoor activities. 